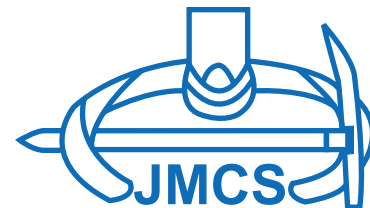


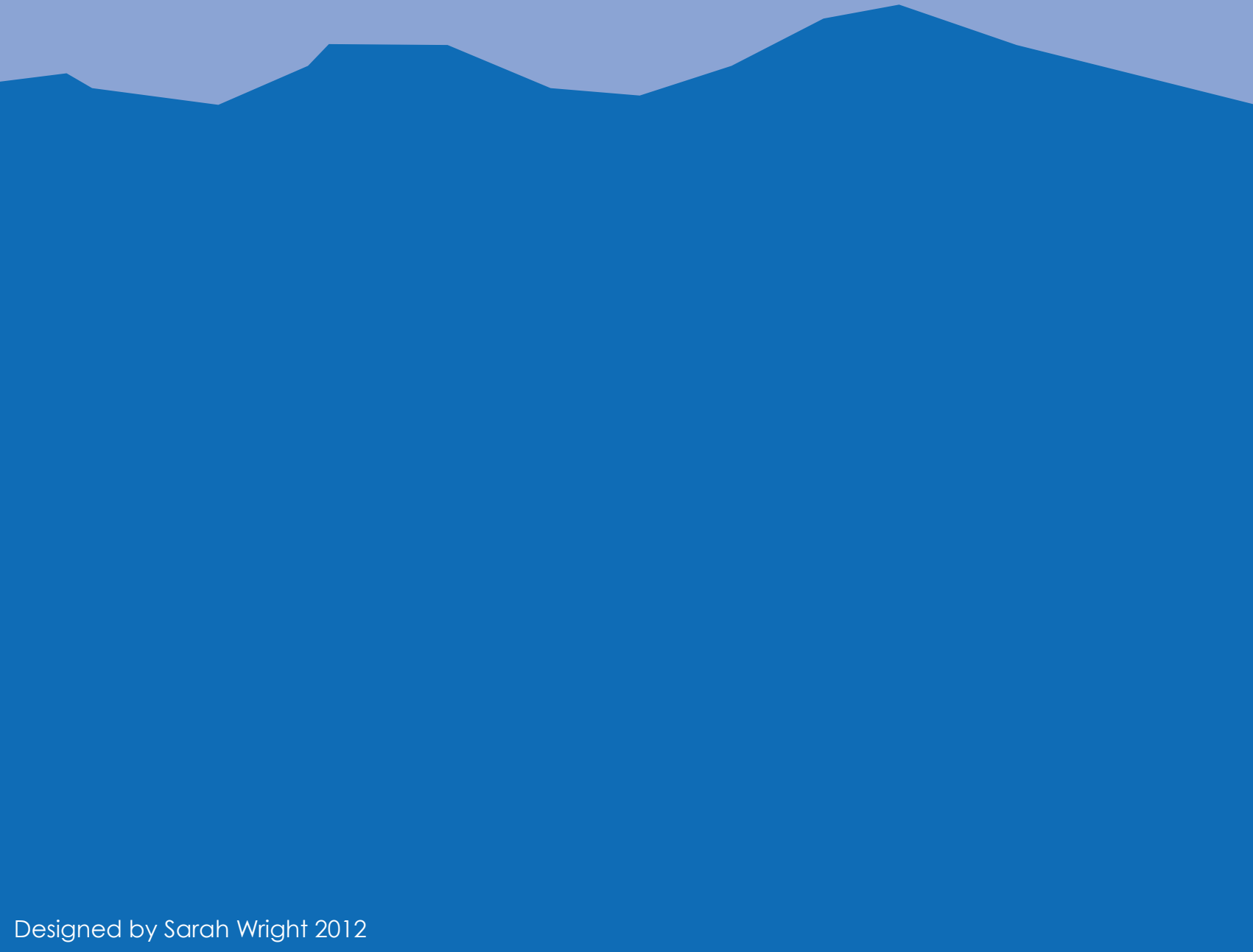
JMCS

Winter Newsletter **2012**



2012

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Secretary's Introduction

Welcome to the Edinburgh JMCS Annual Newsletter 2012, featuring articles and photos about our members' exploits over the last year or so.

There is a particularly wide geographical range of settings this year, from Peru to the Arctic circle via Spain, Italy, Switzerland, England and Scotland.

Mountaineering is a very popular pastime these days and in his article Bruce Macrosson mentions some of the risks consequent on overcrowding in the Alps. On the other hand, Dave Buchanan shows how easy it is to escape the crowds in the Cairngorms by doing one's own thing away from the pistes and Dave Coustick's trip to the Arctic reminds us that there are still large parts of the world where you are unlikely to meet anyone other than your companions. Dangling

in mid air above a wild sea, Stuart Buchanan probably would have swapped his solitude for a bit of human company (I asked him if he had any photographs of his experience, which in retrospect was a silly question, as he was hardly likely to put off prusiking up the rope to take self portraits.)

In her article about Monte Rosa, Ruth Love concludes with a tantalising reference to kissing bald heads. Then Bryan Rynne writes about a week in the Picos de Europa with her. We must assume it is pure coincidence that Bryan is not well covered on top ... !

I hope you enjoy this Newsletter. From time to time I worry about whether anyone reads it. I would welcome any feedback you would like to give me about its layout or contents. Email me at: david.small@advocates.org.uk.

As usual, my thanks go to the authors and also to Sarah Wright whose masterly editing and web-publishing skills produced the quality Newsletter which is now open on your screen.

David Small



Watkins Mountains, East Greenland

Dave Coustick

“How about some unclimbed peaks and the highest peak in the Arctic?” That was the essence of the email I received from my friend Graham early this year, when I was on the other side of the world. Sounded good apart from the price; it involved flying direct from Iceland to a remote glacier, which does not come cheap. I thought next year might be better for the budget but Graham was persuasive. “It won’t be any cheaper next year, and you’ll just be a year older.”

So here we were in Iceland having a day of tourism before heading north-east. There were four of us, Graham, Ewan,

Ian and me; we had yet to meet up with the fifth, Rafa, from Poland, and our guide, Bruce. We had elected to go on a trip organised by Tangent Expeditions, which kept the logistics (fairly) simple. There were however a few last minute changes – like when we had to get our skis to Tangent’s base in The Lakes some weeks in advance with only a few days notice, and the sudden addition of Bruce’s wife, Kate (also a guide) and her two clients, and the route we were to take from Iceland to Greenland kept changing! Would we be going via Constable Point or direct and was it our charter all the way or scheduled to CP?

In the end it was a scheduled flight from Reykjavik to Isafjordur and then the chartered twin otter ski-plane to the Watkins Mountains for the four of us plus Rafa and Kate. A spectacular flight across the Greenland coast to a landing at a camp on the glacier. Bruce was already here with three polar explorers on an equipment testing trip who were sharing some of the costs of the plane. Also there was all our food and most of the equipment for the two weeks. However this was not our initial campsite so it was remove some seats from the plane and load the food, sledges (pulks) and Bruce and head about 25km to our

Door to door transport



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Although we were some 50km from the coast and at 2600m it was theoretically possible that a polar bear could pay a visit.

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Ewan and Graham on Gunnbjornsfjell

camp area on a different glacier.

We had a lot of kit and the pilot was not sure if could take off with it all at once but said he'd give it a go! A long and bumpy ride down the glacier and the plane's skis leave the snow, then we dip and they touch again but then we manage to gain a small amount of altitude. We soon arrive overhead our destination but the pilot needs to recce before landing.

"No one's landed here for six years so I need to check it looks OK to land," he advises. All goes well and we soon get everything unloaded. However our ski bags, which also had axes etc in them, were still at Constable Point along with Mario and Kin Man, Kate's two clients. Fortunately the plane returned from CP three hours later with them and the kit as planned before flying back to Iceland. - "See you in two weeks time."

It was a nice day and we soon had our camp established and a brew on, followed by dinner. The temperature in the sun was not too bad but later when the sun dipped behind the mountains it dropped dramatically and the overnight reading inside the tent was around minus twenty. Fine inside the sleeping bag but pretty nippy for doing anything.

The cold meant we did not make an early start the next morning, waking at 8 and leaving well after 11; it took a long time to melt enough snow and get everything sorted; we later discovered that our stove

was not working properly which is why our tent (two-man) was the slowest at boiling water!

Today's objective is to bag a couple of unclimbed peaks at the head of one of the glaciers that fork off near our campsite. They may appear quite close but Greenland glaciers are always deceptive and it always seems to take forever to get anywhere. The peaks are both straightforward and at around 3300m in height are not too much above our camp at 2600m. However the return down the glacier was not as easy as it looked; most of it was of such a slight gradient that we could not glide and had to shuffle along, though mostly without needing skins. I think it was about eight o'clock when I got back to the tent; I wasn't the first but neither was I the last!

So the next morning several of the team decided to have a rest day, which meant there was a need for some safety training. Although we were some 50km from the coast and at 2600m it was theoretically possible that a polar bear could pay a visit. We had an alarmed fence around the tents but we also needed to be able to use the flares and/or rifle should the need arise. Hitting the bear (cardboard box anyway) at 10m was easy enough; whether the real animal would be quite as easy was another matter!

Our reduced contingent set out for

Our first camp



a couple of other new peaks which proved straightforward but we had to be careful of crevasses once we had the skis off for the summit ridge. Graham's legs suddenly disappeared as we were donning our crampons; time to put the rope back on after just taking it off.

Our third day of exploration was to take us to International Peak, which had received a few ascents over the years, but in the end the limited snow cover and consequent hard ice led us to an alternative objective. This time we had a nice ski down by a different route direct to the tents.

Time to move base so we packed up everything into the pulks and set off

down the glacier. It was only very gently sloping so no danger of being overrun by our loads but also quite slow going. After about six hours we were close to a junction of glaciers with a plan to move up a different glacier for a camp. I was pretty knackered by then and could not see the point in towing all our kit up through crevassed terrain which we would need to descend a couple of days later. Better two days up and down without pulks and I'm glad to say my request was accepted.

I was clearly not the only one feeling tired and the following day it was just Graham, Ewan and myself along with the two guides who set out for the day. After a couple of hours we got to the steeper section of

glacier which presented a bit of an obstacle due to its crevassed nature and we tried a few false leads before eventually getting past the slots. Today was turning out to be very hot, especially on the final ridge to our summit objective. However some 30m below the peak there was a disconcerting woomph from the snow followed by a very loud "go back down NOW!" from Bruce. Fortunately nothing more happened and we enjoyed some nice snow on the middle part of the descent.

I knew that the day after next we would have a long pulk hauling journey, including a fair section uphill, so decided it was my turn for a day of rest. Everyone else went out, repeating the first part of yesterday's route through the glacier

before going for a different peak. I spent my time reading and tinkering around the campsite including experimenting with solar power! This involved using a sheet of reflective material, which was being used for under-thermarest insulation by one tent, shaping this into a curve and placing pans and bottles of snow to absorb the sun's rays. I reckon I got a Sigg bottle up to at least 40°C. Even without this arrangement we regularly left pans of snow in our tents while out for the day and returned to water, which saved fuel and time.

Now for the long haul. The temperature had risen significantly by now so we

were up at 5 and away by 8 to avoid too much work in the heat. It took about eight hours to get round the corner and up the Upper Woolley Glacier to the basecamp for Gunnbjörnsfell, (GBF) the highest peak in the Arctic at 3695m. The plan thereafter was to have a rest day before going for the peak, some 1500m of ascent from the camp. It would be a long day no doubt but by now (22nd May) sunset was not until 21st July so there would be enough daylight.

Our rest day turned into three as a storm came in and we dozed and read. It was not a bad storm but it was not conditions for a significant ascent, though Ewan

and Graham did go for a brief sortie up the glacier for a couple of hours one afternoon.

Our revised plan after this was a partial ascent on the first clear day to set a track, followed by the ascent of GBF. So on the second day we set out on a beautiful morning for the summit, though the track we had put in was rather windblown. As we neared the col, about 1000m above the camp, the weather had changed and it was cold, windy and visibility was poor so we had to return to base.

We now only had one day left for a



The view from Gunnbjörnsfell

summit attempt before the plane would return to pick us up. The weather looked great once again and most of us were keen to give it a go despite (some of us at least) being somewhat tired by the previous day. So all but two of us set out once more. Bruce took it very easy to accommodate the slowest and I was grateful that I seemed to be going well and had regained my enthusiasm (lost the day the before). We reached the col after nearly six hours, where we had a lunch break and left the skis.

The final section to the summit involved a couple of pitches, one of them quite icy. We split into three ropes with me being behind Bruce and Mario. Although officially one of Kate's clients there is no way she could have held Mario who probably weighed twice as much as her! On the icy (traversing) pitch I was a bit concerned when I saw Mario's technique – I could see him falling off and taking me penduluming with me! It was not helped by Mario's poor understanding of English instructions but fortunately he did not come off. The upper section was literally a stroll and we summited at five o'clock with a fabulous view in all directions.

For the descent most of us abseiled apart from Mario who was lowered. By that point most of us were a few hundred metres ahead and the realised that Bruce was struggling to pull the rope down. There was much activity above us while

first Kate then Bruce climbed up to free the stuck rope but this was eventually achieved and we reassembled at the col. Skis on at seven and we would soon be back at the tents. Or so we thought, but the descent was the worst breakable crust any of us, guide included, had ever experienced and multiple wipeouts were the order of the day before we arrived back at camp at nine.

A late dinner and a good sleep before packing up for the return flight. During dinner the three polar explorers returned from their equipment trials as they were to share our plane. The team, led by Ben Saunders, had the longer term plan is to re-enact Scott's planned journey to and from the South Pole and all being well will be more or less en route by the time you read this – see www.scott2012.org.

The twin otter had to make two trips to take us all and we eventually made it to Akureyri in northern Iceland for some real food and beer! The next day we flew south to Reykjavik where a sunny day had brought everyone out on to the streets where we enjoyed more food, beer, wine for both lunch and dinner leading to a very hungover 4.30am bus to the airport.

Overall a great trip. We had achieved our objectives but the last one had been uncertain until the last minute, which made our success that much sweeter.

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Apparent good cover all the way
to Monadh Mor



Spring Ski Touring in the Cairngorms

Dave Buchanan

To ski tour in Scotland you must be an optimist, an opportunist, and often be prepared to carry your skis quite a long way to the snow-line. Over the years, I have skied in Scotland in every month from October through to June - although not all in the same season. 2011-12 was poor until the end of April. Then, amazingly, after everyone had given up, a huge dump of snow arrived in the Cairngorms, and I had an excellent week of touring.

Pat and I have a time share in Aviemore which we go to at the end of April each year. Occasionally, we have managed get on to skis, but usually we enjoy the great on and off road cycling and walking that is available. This year was different! After spending Saturday climbing at Dunkeld with Brian Finlayson, I headed off to Aviemore. The view from Aviemore was extraordinary, clear skies and the snow level at about 900 metres. I was looking forward to the next day.

Keen to get a tour in before the snow melted, I left the upper Cairngorm car park at about 7, and took the path below the corries towards the west side of Coire an Lochan. Then boots, skis and skins on, and off towards Ben Macdui. There was good cover all the way, and being

a sunny Sunday, many people about on skis. From the summit I enjoyed great views towards Braeriach and Cairn Toul.

Nowadays I find leaving the summit of Ben Macdui on nordic skis a little unnerving. Its quite a gentle slope, but there are usually lots of people about to observe my lack of skill. This time my conservative stem turns went fine, and soon I relaxed into the long easy traverse to the slopes above Lurchers Meadow. A few long traverses and stem turns got me down to the top of Lurchers Gully. A few more big turns down the gully, and then a long traverse into Coire an Lochan. From the coire, straightforward kick and glide skiing took me to the outflow from Coire an t-Sneachda. By linking patches, I got almost all the way to the path before I had to give up skiing and walk. Once on the path I met up with Charlie and Susan who had also been touring. A superb day.

Monday was rather dreich with the cloud low on the high hills, so Pat and I explored some woodland walking around Carbridge. Tuesday dawned fine so we set off to enjoy possibly the best easy mountain tour in the Cairngorms. Quite a lot of snow had disappeared since Sunday, but we didn't have to walk far

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Two years previously I had almost uninterrupted skiing and the rivers had been bridged with snow. That had been at the end of one of the best winters of recent years

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Brian telemarking above the Lairig Gru

from the car park before putting on skis. Pleasant kick and glide skiing took us into Coire an t-Sneachda with an interesting cloud formation visible above the cliffs. We then traversed across Fiacail Coire an t-Sneachda into Coire an Lochan and up to its two lochans below the cliffs. After enjoying the views, we returned by our outward route to the car park. Yet another great day.

On Wednesday I was joined by Davey More. We skinned and walked up the wind scoured ridge of Fiacail a Coire Cas. Then from the cairn we skied easily across the plateau to the site of the demolished St Valery Hut above Stag Rocks. The weather was again good and we had fine views south towards Derry Cairngorm. After lunch we skied uphill to Cairn Lochan. Here we were

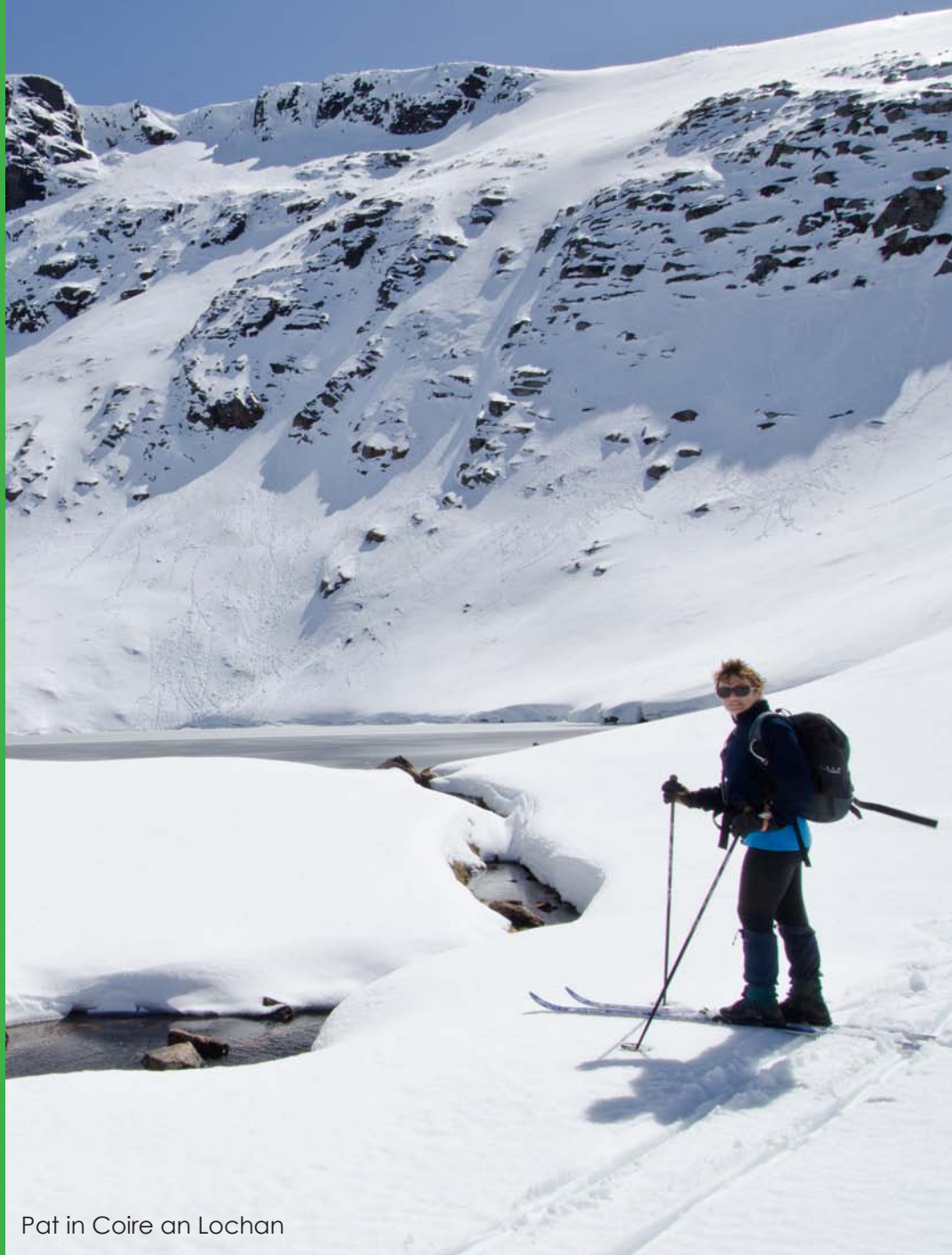
entertained by two snow-kiters (skiing or boarding with a small parachute). From there Davey and I took different routes into Coire an Lochan. I skied down to Lurchers Meadow and followed my route from Sunday. Meanwhile, Davey, on alpine skis took a more direct route down the west wall of the coire. We then skied out of the coire to the path back to the car park.

One of my favourite ski touring areas is the high plateau of the Great Moss above Glen Feshie. I had skied Monadh Mor at the same time of year two years previously, so it seemed a suitable objective. It is a technically easy, but long, tour with a great feeling of remoteness. So, early on Thursday I set off on the walk up from Achlean in Glen Feshie - longish, but on a good path.

Just before the edge of the plateau, I put on skis and skins and headed towards the little bealach to the south of Carn Ban Mor. From there I could see across to Monadh Mor and the cover looked complete. However, a lot of ground was hidden from me and as I descended I found that a lot of that ground was snow free and boggy. Two years previously I had almost uninterrupted skiing and the rivers had been bridged with snow. That had been at the end of one of the best winters of recent years, when the ground had been frozen, and covered by snow for several months. This day, the snow that I was skiing over had fallen on comparatively warm sodden ground and had been melting for over a week. Nevertheless I persevered and I was rewarded with a summit ridge was that better covered than it had been the

previous time. From the summit I skied due north and got a good run down towards the Allt Luinneag. Crossing it was interesting (as it had been on the way up Monadh Mor). I then linked patches along the edge of Glen Einich towards the path down to Achlean. A long day, with more walking than I wanted, but worthwhile. The melting snow also provided some interesting photo opportunities.

Friday was not a day for the tops, but we had a great cycle through Rothiemurchus Forest. Saturday was much better, and despite diminishing snow, I had another tour of Ben Macdui with my son Stuart and Brian Donaldson. There had been an overnight frost making the snow icy so under-ski conditions were not as good as on the other days. This time we walked up Fiacail a Coire Cas, and skied fairly directly across the plateau to Ben Macdui. Our return route was essentially the same as mine had been the previous Saturday, except we skied as far as we could down Lurchers Gully. This gave Stuart and Brian plenty of opportunity to show off their Telemark turns. A good end to a poor season. Actually, good conditions for ski touring on the Cairngorm plateau continued well into May (see SAIS Northern Cairngorms blog), but I didn't take further advantage.



Pat in Coire an Lochan



The fore summit of the
Dent du Geant,
festooned with folk

Night Terrors

Bruce Macrosson

Is it just me? It's the night before action, departure is nigh, rest is needed & the mind craves silence, yet the sweet oblivion of sleep will not come. Instead fears gnaw, guilt murmurs & the demons whisper. Crampons slip and bodies fall, whilst thoughts turn to home, love, warmth and responsibilities.

I was fortunate this year in having the chance to sneak off to the Alps this August with SMC & JMCS stalwart David Small for another pop at the Matterhorn. My long suffering family, patient as always, as I abandoned them for nine days

In light of our past history, David & I must have done something wrong in the eyes of the Alpine weather gods. So it was with a sinking sense of "well, it can't last much longer now" when we heard tales of blue skies & dry summit rocks in the fortnight prior to departure.

We were understandably keen to get onto the Matterhorn as soon as possible whilst the good weather held. So the clock was ticking and we had to get up it fast. Unfortunately the Matterhorn is somewhat high (4400 m) and 7 climbing days not really enough time to get ready with acclimatisation and stuff. We had a plan though and like most mountain plans it all

seemed so straightforward whilst being discussed cosily over a lunchtime coffee. Like most mountain plans it was also pretty optimistic.

The plan, simple; jump off plane on arrival, into hire car, shoot off to Italy, up cable-car into Torino hut (3300m), acclimatise and rest overnight . Then up at 4am on first day, sprint over glacier to foot of the Dent de Geant, romp up its mixed approach, a few heaves on the ropes on the summit spire. Then summit photos, couple of abseils, a quick scramble down and back to hut for tea. And that would be us acclimatised, fit and ready for the main course.

Reality. Off plane knackered after no sleep, sit motionless in Mt Blanc tunnel queues, fry in Italian sun, pack then unpack before repacking rucksacks again, lug stuff up to hut, linguistic challenges. Before lying in bed that night feeling alarmingly weird, tired and ill with my usual night terrors in full flow. By this point I was now both seriously doubting both my abilities and the wisdom of our masterplan.

Thankfully the night terrors evaporate once crampons are rasping on glacial neves and the urge to burn off those headtorches in front builds. We overtake those other Brits from the hut, get onto broken mixed ground, the upward mountain rhythm overtakes, sun comes up and it begins to feel good to climbing again.

I am surprised and enthused by fact that

apart from thumping hearts we are still going okay despite the altitude. With blue skies above, vistas of golden granite and sparkling glaciers all around our position is fantastic. We start up the summit spire, having now joining the Euro queue. Getting nervous now and butterflies as we swing out onto the Burgener slabs above the abyss.

The arena of Alpine rope wars has now been entered. Guides & scrabbling clients above, below and all around. A firm approach is called for and after much manouvering and delay the top is reached. (Glad David didn't see the client who reached out to pull up on a rope, not the fixed one, but the one that hung down from David 15 metres above, and he would have pulled up on it too if monsieur Le Chamonix Guide had not stopped him!!). The abseils from Summit spire were well worth waiting for, highly impressive with Courmayeur winking up from 2000metres below our descending boot soles.

Got back to hut buzzing, a really satisfying day, the rock on the Dent superb and the whole package an enjoyable one. Quite amazed I had felt okay after a fairly rough night. We were not completely exhausted and things seemed good for Matterhorn.

Part two of master plan, down from Torino hut and scoot over to Zermatt.

A beautiful drive and I really enjoyed the

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Thankfully the night terrors evaporate once crampons are rasping on glacial neves and the urge to burn off those headtorches in front builds.

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The Matterhorn
looming large



chance to relax and soak up the sights. The holiday mood soon evaporated on parking at Tasch however with the Matterhorn looming dark and brooding overhead as rucksacks were packed again and the predictable exasperation as the slick yet brutal Zermatt money extraction machine took hold.

We then luxuriated that night in the Hotel Banhoff hostel, best hostel I've ever stayed in. Followed by panic the next morning as the weather was checked and on first reading it looked like it would break tomorrow, or was that the day after ?

It was a beautiful walk up to the Hornli hut that morning, and I was feeling strong now, would have loved it too if nerves about the coming event had not been taking hold. Matterhorn was by now right above us looking alarmingly big steep and nasty.

The advice is to recce the first hour of the route as route day before. So on arrival at hut up we went. Much discussion then ensued about intended tactics, rope lengths etc. Feeling surprisingly cocky at this stage, my intention at this point for summit day tactics was heads down, short rope, move move move and let upwards momentum propel us up, "hey David" I heard myself say, "we could always just keep on going & kip in the Solvay hut". We had been told it was only a long curved ridge with a few heaves on fixed ropes after all.



Relief at never having to go up the Hornli again

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Things are steeper now, higher too, as my throbbing head reminds me as we take hold the first upper fixed ropes. We are now in the shadow, the rocks iced and wind has picked up.

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Forty five minutes later my cockiness had vanished. Disconcertingly big drops, outward facing rock strata, crumbling rock and a lack of security became ever more evident leading to a crisis of confidence on turning round to descend. The actual climbing on the way up had been straight forward, even enjoyable. But on looking down, the abyss loomed, the rocks seemed to have steepened and it looked terrifying. Thankfully, in reality, it proved to be pretty straightforward but serious doubts about tomorrow were gnawing.

We'll have to down climb 1200m of that tomorrow, probably worse and what would those rocks be like if we did get an afternoon thunderstorm ?

It was a tense dinner that night. The sleepless hours with the night terrors that followed were probably the crux of the route for me. I wonder if it was the same for David?

As an unguided British party I would imagine we had a pretty average experience on the route. Firstly amazement that the rumours really were true. They do lock the hut doors at night, guides get released first. Punters queue at a locked door, which springs open at 4.20 am, sprint to the bottom of the starting buttress and queue for 15 minutes. Then jockeying for position and route finding confusion in the dark, which led us onto some steep loose ground, with no belays, and stonefall from parties above. Tensions which had steadily been mounting in the darkness lift as the ridge crest is reached, sun rises and optimism returns. Progress speeds yet the Solvay bivouac hut frustratingly never seems to get closer. Nevertheless it is reached, the Mosely slabs are fun, guidebook time is by now being hit, then all stop.

Things are steeper now, higher too, as my throbbing head reminds me as we take hold the first upper fixed ropes. We are now in the shadow, the rocks iced

and wind has picked up. All starting to feel serious again. Guides and clients now drop down onto us with no intention of stopping producing confusion, irritation and delay. Eventually we reach the top of the ropes, finally untangled from descending parties. Up the icy summit slope and quite unexpectedly we are suddenly standing on summit.

No euphoria, just relief to now being going in the right direction, down. Determination to get down safe and efficiently. The mountain now seems to be alarmingly empty rather than busy! My lack of acclimatisation now kicks in properly with the usual pounding head, dry mouth and lethargy.

Carefully down the summit iciness. Onto ropes, abseils around Solvay hut, route finding queries on the bottom quarter and finally overwhelmingly sweet feelings of relief as we swing down the final rope, get onto the path and even make it back to hut just in time for tea.

Too mentally and physically drained to take it all in that evening. However the next morning, walking down with the air still fresh, the sun starting to warm and the Valais giants arrayed all around felt amazing. Deep satisfaction at what lay behind, enriched and inspired by what I saw and already hungry for more. All so different from those cold dark hours, with the terrors.

Abseiling

Stuart Buchanan

I'm not a fan of abseils. Even on a short abseil off solid double bolts and a chain I worry about the anchors, sharp edges and going off the end of the rope. I even less keen on abseiling into the unknown – will I find the next set of anchors, or have to swing around to get to them, the rope twanging off spikes and edges as I do so? So you can imagine my enthusiasm for abbing into a semi hanging tidal belay on to the big sea cliffs of Pembroke!

Alasdair and I were on the first day of a weeklong climbing trip, a last adventure together before Fergus was born. The forecast suggested constant rain everywhere except the far South West, so we drove to Pembroke. Most of the climbing at Pembroke lies within army firing ranges, and on our arrival the ranges were closed, so we headed to Mother Cary's Kitchen, also known as Mother Scary's for the committing approaches. We warmed up on a superb VS arête then located the top of Rock Idol, a classic E1. As it was Alasdair's lead, I was abbing first to set up the belay.

Stake belays seemed to indicate the line, so over the edge I went, into the shade and shortly thereafter over a roof and into space. Mmmmmm - a free-hanging abseil as well. Joy.

Looking straight down I could see the ledge we were aiming for, at the corner of a huge overhung bay, capped on one side by a series of roofs I had come over, and with wine dark seas surging back and forth at the bottom. The rope had dropped into the sea, but the perspective made it impossible to determine the distance between the two – 1 foot or 10?

Thinking that I'd be able to swing onto the ledge I continued down into the maw of the sea. The single strand of rope looked frail and stretches beyond its 10.5mm diameter.

Shortly thereafter I was a couple of feet above the surging waves trying to swing against empty space to reach a ledge much further away than it had looked from above. Newtonian mechanics were not on my side. Without anything to push against I had to rely on shifting my weight at the bottom of a 50m pendulum. What works well in the playpark doesn't scale and my attempts were futile.

My next idea was to use the rope to lasso a nubbin of rock on the ledge and pull myself in. I hauled the wet rope onto my lap, tied a loop, then made like John Wayne. Unfortunately Newton was against me again and the movement of throwing the lasso caused me to pirouette on the end of the rope. Lassoing occupied me for quite some time and

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I'm not a fan of abseils. Even on a short abseil off solid double bolts and a chain I worry about the anchors, sharp edges and going off the end of the rope.

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resulted only in getting me thoroughly soaked by the wet rope and rising tide snapping at my bottom.

Finally I had to admit defeat and I started the long prussik out of the bay. My thought flitted between fear that my movement was causing the rope to be sawn on a sharp edge of limestone and the certainty that Alasdair would be abbing first in future!

Postscript: The rest of the trip was much more successful. Alasdair and I climbed dozens of superb routes, including War Games (E1), The Arrow (E1), Welcome to the Cruise (HVS) and Riders on the Storm (HVS), a traverse line just above the crashing waves. Invariably the routes were long pitches on very steep limestone with huge pockets and fantastic gear. A bit like a warmer version of Ratho at the sea side.

The Full Monte!

Ruth Love

Following a knee operation last year and beset with more minor injuries and lay offs from climbing earlier this year I thought it best to go for something this summer involving fitness, hard work and altitude rather than the highly technical. I also wanted to join the SMC Alpine meet in the Orco Valley, Gran Paradiso Park, Italy which was to be mostly rock climbing. Monte Rosa (also in the park) has been on my wish list for a long time so I hatched a plan to climb this and then join the SMC for a few days afterwards. Now to find a partner.

Though a bit last minute, one came in the form of Graeme Tough – the friend of long standing (on winter belays) who you may remember from the last article (does anyone read these?). So the Tough – Love team strike again! He, like me preferred to mix things up a bit but could only manage 11 days and we would need to acclimatise. The schedule would be tight.

A difficulty seemed to be finding acclimatisation peaks that were not too low but not nearly as high as Monte Rosa itself. We would have to balance access, climbing, sleeping and travelling in between venues in a way that optimised time available. Whilst Graeme was on a family holiday in Arisaig, I pored over

maps and guide books and sought advice. I discovered a lesser known valley (Turtmann) going up from the Rhone Valley (Switzerland), between the Zermatt Valley and Val d'Herence. It has a wonderful hut (2519m) eponymous with valley and is one of the most friendly and welcoming I have ever stayed in. They were delighted to have visitors from Scotland with one bearing the name of Love – works every time! The previous night from arrival at Malpensa (Italy) airport, had been fraught and late and seen us sleeping in a service centre in tent and car, disturbed by the manoeuvring of

big trucks. All these troubles were soothed away at the Turtmann!

And so we began our acclimatisation on the cheap as the Barrhorn mountain at 3621m is really a walking mountain so a nice, easy start. We did not want to kill ourselves before the main event. To prolong the effects of altitude, Graeme and I sunbathed on the summit for about 40 minutes. We also stayed at the hut another night to avoid having to sleep low in the valley. We could have climbed the Brunegghorn (3833m) from the same hut but it was fully booked the night after. In



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On your marks, get ready.....we were off! We had risen sharply at about 1.00am and breakfasted efficiently. Taking advice to depart with the guides we were the second team away

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the Himalayas one remembers the “Sleep low climb high” rule. In our case we felt that it was more appropriate to sleep fairly high and climb even higher.

The Dix hut (Val d’Heremence) from which we planned to climb another easy peak, La Lurette was full. Next option, the nearby Les Vignettes hut (Val de Herens) from which we climbed a similar sort of peak called La Pigne de Arolla (3796m). Yes, again quite easy although we navigated through mist and there was doubt in the morning as to whether it would be sensible to go out. All turned out fine with spectacular views and back early for more sunbathing on the terrace of the hut.

Surrounded by French climbers we told them “We are altitude training!

We changed our plan of staying at the hut a second night to descend that afternoon to the camp site in Arolla at just over 2000m. We had realised by then that descending from the hut, re packing sacks, shopping for food, driving to Tasch, catching a train to Zermatt and then another to Rotenboden plus walking to the Monte Rosa hut would just be too much in a day that would have had to begin at about 5.00am. The camp site was lovely and great to get a shower, which in the Swiss style was superbly clean and powerful!

After re mortgaging our houses and selling Graeme’s son we found ourselves at the Monte Rosa hut. Many of you will know how expensive it all is around Zermatt. Car parking, two trains and the hut fees really do break the bank. I thought to myself, I hope we are successful on this mountain or we will have some explaining to do with our respective partners! But it is quite an experience and the second train journey up to a station above the Gorner Glacier takes you past The Matterhorn which I had never seen close up. Wow! Do I really want to climb such a pointy, scary thing? Mmmm I do actually. You can ask David Small and Bruce McCrossan what it is like as you may have heard that they made a successful ascent of it in August of this year. Congratulations to them.

The new Monte Rosa hut is an amazing edifice of clever design, extremely hi tech, environmentally friendly with a capacity of 120. Its construction involved 3,000 helicopter journeys, transporting 35 workers and materials. It is worth a visit even if you don’t climb a nearby mountain. People go there for lunch! Once dropped off at Rotenboden station using the Gornergratbahn, one descends on a trail to the dry Gorner Glacier which can be crossed fairly easily without roping but taking care as the crevasses are negotiated (or hopped over). An assisted (ladders/rails/steps) rock scramble then takes one up a few hundred metres to the hut. On the return journey we wondered if we were imagining that a new metal bridge had appeared. Yes it had, where a crevasse had opened up and melted where we had previously jumped from a slabby rock wall, over a chasm onto the glacier. There was sawdust scattered all around the bridge ends to prevent slipping!

Very comfortable sleeping quarters, but with staff quite noisy at night combined with slight anxiety at how we would do next day, sleep was fitful. However, we managed a good rest and were safe in the knowledge that we had checked out the start of the route so that we would not be fumbling in the dark and become lost next morning. Guides and other guests most helpful as usual and we appreciated the beta from Bruce who climbed the



Graham on the summit

mountain last year.

On your marks, get ready.....we were off! We had risen sharply at about 1.00am and breakfasted efficiently. Taking advice to depart with the guides we were the second team away behind a guided party. The route was a bit complicated – all a jumble of rock with cairns difficult to spot so we aimed to keep the guide in sight. We were overtaken by other guided

parties but by then we had sussed the route and after about an hour and a half had reached the glacier part of it. We now felt that we could do the new rope up technique (guidelines have changed) in our sleep – and we pretty much were still! Simon had had us strung up in our stairwell practicing crevasse rescue again. Such abuse but thank you!

We then faced a steady slog of nearly

2000m up the glacier including an hour's moving together along the final ridge. Top tip for anyone else planning to climb Monte Rosa – take a ski pole as well as an axe! It is alien to me to do so on a crevassed glacier but you can always throw your pole away if anything happens. Now I would see if the training paid off. I had been on the hill nearly every weekend, even in Ireland after attending a family wedding. But I believe it is the

swimming lengths I'd clocked up in the Boness pool after work in a punishing regime of Olympian proportions that did the trick!

Monte Rosa is not quite as high as Mont Blanc at 4,633.9metres but the guide book rightly states that it is a more demanding mountain. Starting from a lower hut one has more height to gain and there is the technical stretch on the West Ridge which leads to the summit known as The Dufourspitze. Route finding is perhaps more intricate but really it is a battle of wills on what many consider to be an arduous trudge. Still, I knew that all would be well when shortly before the dawn started, right in front of me and only slightly above my head, appeared a shooting star! Graeme missed it unfortunately but we took it as a good omen and applied ourselves to the business in hand. With steady determination and Graeme ploughing strongly onwards and upwards in the lead we reached the summit in a respectable time.

After completing the usual summit rituals with the most spectacular surrounds we headed down. My Alpine guru Bruce, again sent us down the iced (as it turned out) couloir that one enters from just beyond the summit. Reversing our route would have seen us squeezing past ascending climbers on the narrow,

exposed ridge and also descending a steep snow slope. A British guide had warned us that the last of six fixed ropes in the couloir was broken and so we knew to use our own rope to abseil the last section instead of prussiking. Once out of the couloir we moved away to have lunch on the glacier. You would think that we had done enough "Altitude training" and should just get down before the snow softened. Perhaps we thought we were divers (Graeme was one once) and needed to decompress! But we sunbathed again in semi reclined position, enjoying the belvedere that we had worked so hard to reach.

Gratification delayed, we did sink a pint back at the hut later. It is necessary to stay a second night as the journey out would be too long and tiring after the climb. The SMC meet which we joined hot foot from Monte Rosa has been written up by member Ian Crofton. I'll leave his story for you to read later. A few key phrases and words would be – Accordion playing – Whisky – Wild flowers - Pasta - Dancing – Dancing on tables (no names mentioned) – Guitars – Singing – Wine - Laughter - Kissing bald heads (no names mentioned either) – Wonderful Mara (hut custodienne) – Oh and a bit of climbing!

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Reversing our route would have seen us squeezing past ascending climbers on the narrow, exposed ridge and also descending a steep snow slope.

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Maureen's Introduction to Winter Climbing

Nigel Sues

So, our editor is short of material! That means he must be sent an embarrassing report on some activity of mine this year – specifically, in this case, of an activity with my innocent wife.

Over more than twenty years of winter climbing I had tried to persuade her to join me on the occasional low grade route. Maureen's response was that she was too young to die. Accordingly, I was more than a little surprised when, in 2010, she said that she would try a route (and risk all). I had many times

emphasised to her that grade I gullies are basically snow plods and only require hill skills and good assessment of avalanche risk.

The route chosen was the West Gully of Beinn an Dothaidh. It went with no problems, pitched using a 60 metre rope. At the summit her comment was that it was only a hill walk. What had I been saying for years?

The next target, the following winter, was the Central Gully of Ben Lui. However,

we chose to try this in a day trip from Edinburgh. That was my error and I was obliged to abandon the trip at Allt an Rund, calculating that a continuation and ascent would result in a nocturnal walk out – and that might diminish her enthusiasm.

The current year saw a JMCS meet at the Cabin in January and a spell of suitable weather – good snow lying, low avalanche risk and clear skies forecast for the Saturday. The target would be the Easy Gully of Creag Meagaidh.

We travelled up on Friday morning to check out our fitness with a wee Munro, Beinn Udlmain. The snow underfoot was excellent and confirmed our plan for the next day. The hut had four other occupants. Bryan Rynne was on a Graham tour. Charles and Sue had chosen a more challenging winter climb than ours and Alan Smith was off to solo something. The hut was cool, which is of course a good thing for winter routes!

We set off from the Meagaidh car park at a reasonable hour and put on our crampons about two hours later, just beyond the lochan. I had carried the larger pack since I had the rope. I expected that we would rope up here and climb pitched as two years earlier.

Maureen looked up “Easy” Gully and comparing its name with her single previous experience, decided that to solo was preferable. She moved on up the Gully, ignoring any offers of team support. Being older and with a heavy sack I lagged further and further behind.

Some three-quarters of the way up the Gully her confidence was checked by a noticeable steepening and a hidden crevasse. She called down to summon support and wedged her ice axe and crampons. If you study a good photo of the Gully this feature is evident. The average angle below is probably 40

degrees or less. I arrived, breathless and was asked to attach the rope and lead over the obstacle. Roping up on a 50 degree snow slope, with a crevasse, is not the easiest procedure, but was eventually achieved. I then took on the lead for about three modest pitches at the end of which we reached the top of the route. We sat on our sacks in the sun for coffee and reflection.

We looked back on this as sound experience which will be imported into future attempts on low grade winter routes. There were no “maritals” and, since Maureen had never visited the Munro summit, we walked west to enjoy this in perfect weather. On our walk back we met one of the Edinburgh JMCS former members, now a star, George McEwan. He had climbed (a grade IV route) with a friend. There was little time for chat and we soon pressed on to reach the car park in the gathering gloom of a January evening.

So what plans are there for 2013? If health permits and if we get the weather there is still Ben Lui, to be better organised this time. Also, there are several easy routes on Coire an t-Sneachda. In the right conditions I may suggest a grade I/II or even an easy grade III! However, I do not see Maureen as my partner on a CIC meet.

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Cordillera Huayhuash Trek

Chris Eilbeck

Any reader based in Scotland will need no reminding that the summer of 2012 was one of the wettest on record – by August I had managed only one Wednesday evening meet in sunshine and one day on the Northumbrian crags in the dry. My winter pallor was not helped by many indoor sessions at AR and at Ratho (though my fingers were getting stronger). F suggested a gentle walking holiday in a sunnier clime to bring back the colour to my cheeks. It was only after I had signed up that I realised we were committed to a serious hike, the Huayhuash circuit: “considered one of the top ten trekking

circuits in the world”, “rated the most difficult in Peru”, “arguably the best hike in the world, but appropriate only for robust, experienced high altitude trekkers”. I must confess to being somewhat nervous – it was over 20 years since I had been over 3000m, and I had spent most of last summer recovering from a bout of low-altitude pneumonia – were my lungs up to a succession of 5000m passes? The only consolation was that this seemed to be a “glamping” version – all heavy gear to be carried on mules, a guide, cook and horseman provided, we would just need to carry a day sack with enough clothes to

cope with the heat/cold/intense sun/rain/hail/snow etc.

So Sept 20 found us on a long-haul flight to Lima, feeling guilty about our carbon footprints and wondering what we had forgotten in our frantic packing the night before. We were met at the airport and driven to our hotel in the centre, and took a full day in Lima to get over the jet lag and see the sights. The following morning saw us on what was the most luxurious bus we had ever seen for the 8 hour journey to the regional capital Huaraz at 3050m. We were out of breath just walking

up the stairs of the hotel! The town situated in a long valley between the Cordillera Blanca and the Cordillera Negra, and is the site of the most intense earthquake ever recorded in the Western hemisphere – intensity 7.8 in 1970, which killed most of the inhabitants (only 91 survived).

Our guide Christian (<http://www.go2andes.com/>) had arranged three acclimatisation days before the big trek started – a wise plan. The first was a gentle (but breathless) stroll from the town to some impressive pre-Inca ruins. On the second we walked a fair way up the Cordillera Negra, to around 4000m, with stunning views of the Cordillera Blanca and the highest peak Huascarán, the highest mountain in Peru at 6,768m.

On the third day we walked up to Churup lake, 4450m, breathtaking in all senses of the word, with the extra spice of a bit of via ferrata in the final stages. Back in Huaraz we were ready for a hot shower and a good night's sleep. Unfortunately the hot water was off in the hotel, and even worse, Christian had discovered that a town up the valley had just announced a 48hr strike starting at midnight, blocking the road to the Cordillera Huayhuash we were planning to take the next day. He had hastily arranged transport starting at 10pm that evening, an overnight drive of 5hrs. I managed some sleep, but every time I woke up I could see the headlights picking out a boulder-strewn hairpin bend with either sheer drop or a vertical wall of rock or mud to each side – better to keep eyes closed. We finished off with

a few hours of sleep in an adobe house in Llámec (3250m), a small village in the mountains.

Next day the trek started properly but relatively gently with a 15km walk on a dirt track road up the valley of the Rio Llámec to a campsite at Quartelhuain at 4170m. Steep rock on all sides but no sign of snow-capped peaks until the final stages, when we caught a glimpse of the Nevando Nirashanca, 5607m. The pack animals and driver had passed up earlier, and by the time we arrived our tent was already up and a very welcome brew was started in the kitchen tent – not just a brew but freshly baked cheese straws as snacks! During our whole trek we were continually amazed by the quantity and quality of the fresh food our cook turned out, using only a two-ring gas hob. We had seen an old lady herding her cows across the hillside on the way up, and she joined us for dinner with tales of life in her mountain abode (a thatched hut very like the black houses of Scottish crofters). We retired to our tent for a good sleep.

The first pass of the hike greeted us the next day, uphill every step from the campsite (once we had escaped the attentions of a particularly ferocious dog – I made sure both Christian and F were between me and the hound, on the grounds that I was the only one not to have had the rabies jabs). It was heavy going up to the col at 4690m, but wonderful views in all directions despite some clouds. From the col, downhill was a relief, no shortage of breath, and



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We had seen an old lady herding her cows across the hillside on the way up, and she joined us for dinner with tales of life in her mountain abode

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a relatively short section of some 7km to a lonely but wonderful campsite at the Mitucocha lake (4230m) below the towering peaks of Nev. Rondo (5870m) and Nev. Jirishanca (6094m). The next day another pass, Carhuac (4630m), but a much easier gradient on both sides before dropping to the wonderfully scenic Carhuacocha lake (4138m) under Nev. Yerupaja (6617m).

The next day was much tougher but very scenic. After traversing the side of Carhuacocha we passed a succession of three deeply coloured glacial lakes before commencing the steep ascent to Siula Punta (4830m). The original path had been changed recently after a tourist fell to his death, but the new one felt scary enough for me. At the col I was feeling quite light-headed, the only effect of the altitude I suffered on the entire trip (apart

from needing to stop for breath after each step!). We had identified a small top near the pass as a potential summit, Cerro Azulcocha 4950m. Although only another 120m of ascent was involved, this had some minor scrambling with rain clouds threatening above. Despite my spaced-out feeling, this ascent passed safely, and we were soon heading down through a hail- and snow-storm to the hamlet of Huayhuash 4350m, population 5 shepherds (including one 94-year old lady nimbly skipping over dry-stone walls with the aid of a walking stick). That night it snowed a few inches at the campsite, followed by a freeze, but the succeeding day was a much easier-angled pass (only 4780m) then a long descent to a campsite below Laguna Viconga.

For once it was hot and dry when we arrived at the campsite, and it had the

added attraction of a large hot tub fed by a local thermal spring. It was wonderful to wash and bathe after a week of cold water (or in my case no water at all, I was not as conscientious as F in washing in ice-cold glacial streams). The area was also formerly known as the site of a training camp for the Shining Path Guerillas, but fortunately such times are past (though there was some continuing activity in another area of Peru during our visit). The next day was our highest pass so far, the Punta Cuyoc, given as 4950m on the map, but over 5000m if one takes a line avoiding the menacing icefields of the Nev. Cuyoc (5550m) above. We descended the other side and camped at 4500m in the valley below, just hitting the tents before the afternoon rainstorm began. Our goal the following day was an unmarked pass across the San Antonio range, again over 5000m. On the way

we surprised a small herd of vicunas who sped off across the scree at great speed. From the col we had a superb view of the Nev. Siula Grande (6344m) and the Nev. Yerupaja, and in the foreground the wonderful glacial lake of Juraucocha.

The small lake up on the left in the photo is the site of Joe Simpson's base camp in his "Touching the Void" epic. A long descent down steep mud and scree slopes led us to the Juraucocha, then followed a very long walk out along the valley of the Rio Calinca to the small town of Huayllapa down at 3490m. We camped in a small field on the edge of the town, then had a short sight-seeing trip round, made somewhat precarious as a new water and sewage system was being installed, so deep unmarked holes and ditches everywhere.

The next day we had a long haul from our low starting point to Tapush Punta, an ascent of 1280m to 4770m, a pass which in true mountain tradition was hidden behind a number of false passes. By this stage I must confess the altitude and my age were beginning to tell. But again downhill proved a welcome relief and the view from the Susucocha lake of Nev. Raju Collata very rewarding (one of the easier snow summits in the range, at 5350m). Relief of a different kind was provided at a camp toilet further down the valley, but other scatological details will go unrecorded. We camped in a side valley which our guides claimed was warmer, but the temperature still fell below freezing again. Our route the next day lay over the



Llaucha Punta at 4850m, but doing this starting from a high camp felt almost straightforward. From the col we took a variation path contouring round a peak and along a long rocky ridge which could almost have been Scottish (apart from the dust and the beds of cactus). At the end was the small top of the Cerro Huacrish (4750m), with a wonderful view of the Jahuacocha (4050m) and Solteracocha lakes, framed by the peaks of Nev. Rondo (5870m), Nev. Jirishanca (6094m), and Nev. Yerupaja again from yet another side.

For once (about time!) we had a "rest" day camping beside Jahuacocha, with just a little excursion to the mountain lakes of Rasacocha and Solteracocha to work up

an appetite. This was just as well, as our guide had caught a large number of fresh trout so we ate an even better meal than usual that night. Our next and final day of the circuit was uneventful apart from the fact that two of the donkeys went missing in the night – fortunately there were enough left that our baggage reached our original starting point of Llamac soon after us, after the traverse of the final pass, Macrash Punta at 4272m. There only remained the celebration banquet lunch to mark the end of the trip, what else but the national dish of Peru, roast guinea-pig. The best trek in the world? As a novice trekker I can't compare, but it would be difficult to imagine anything more spectacular!

The Naranjo. The routes we did are round the back to the left.



Climbing the Naranjo de Bulnes in the Picos de Europa

Bryan Rynne

Ruth and I had each been to the Picos before and knew it to be a superb area for walking and cycling. I once cycled past its southern flank, along the mediaeval Pilgrim's Route from Southern France to Santiago de Compostella, and on another occasion did a circuitous road-bike tour through the heart of the area. Although the cycling was great, it was clear that the walking would be superb, and get you much more into the heart of these spectacular mountains than cycling along

the roads could.

Ruth and Simon have had several walking holidays there, usually moving on through the extensive network of huts. In particular, they have often stayed in the Urriello hut, below the massive tower of El Naranjo de Bulnes, formerly known as Pico Urriello. Although this is not the highest peak in the Picos, this massive monolith towers above the immediate surroundings and is an obvious magnet

for any mountaineer. However, there is no easy, i.e., walking or scrambling, way up it - you have to climb it! This of course makes it an even more appealing target for climbers. In view of this repeated close proximity, Ruth decided that we had to get up it and informed me of this - as is my wont, I then agreed. Hence, we found ourselves there in mid September.

The wall of the Naranjo immediately above the hut contains an array of climbs

up to about 800m, at up to about 8a free or, more usually, aided at various grades. However, as it was our first climbing trip there we decided that, tempting though these routes may be, we would give them a miss and go for some of the easier ones round the back. In fact, to make sure we got up it at all, we initially opted for the easiest (and by far the most popular) route on the Naranjo - the Martinez Direct Route, HS 4b (UKC grading), up the south face.

This consists of 5 pitches, totaling about 140 metres, then a few hundred metres of scrambling to the summit. This route is also the abseil descent for most of the routes on the Naranjo, so has bombproof belays, but you might meet a lot of people coming down...

We also did the route Via Paso Horizontal, at a similar grade, containing a spectacular 35 metre traverse above a gaping void (presumably the 'horizontal' bit of the name), to join the Martinez route for the descent.

The rock on the Naranjo is very rough, steep slabby limestone with tremendous friction. A major feature of the rock are the canalizos, or water channels, running down the rock. The trick to climbing these is to bridge out between them and wedge your toes in some widely separated ones, and pinch grip the ones straight in front of your face. This is more secure than it sounds, and with careful footwork you can make good progress (you need careful

footwork because, if your foot slips, the pinch grips won't hold you).

The routes are not bolted, so modern, high-technology protection is required (the aid routes seem to have more traditional style pegs and threaded tat on them). In fact, the canalizos usually yield very poor nut or hex placements, so modern camming devices are essential (OK, Martinez probably climbed it, in 1944, in hob-nailed boots with a piece of string and some pebbles for protection, but Ruth and I wanted something a bit more sophisticated).

Even these usually yielded fairly wobbly placements, with all the cams pointing at different angles - just what the instructions say to avoid! I would have to say that when you look down 5 metres or so at your last friend, swaying gently in the breeze, careful footwork comes quite naturally.

So, on the two routes we did the climbing was very good, and exciting, but we eschewed anything desperately hard. In difficulty, imagine a slightly easier version of Pain Pillar, with 3 poor bits of gear along the way, but big rings waiting for you at the top. Of course, there is a multitude of other routes, at whatever degree of difficulty you desire.

Another feature of the area seems to be dramatic cloud inversions. On two mornings we awoke to cold, dank, grey drizzle - just like standard Munro-bagging

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Martinez probably climbed it, in 1944, in hob-nailed boots with a piece of string and some pebbles for protection, but Ruth and I wanted something a bit more sophisticated

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Ruth and Bryan on the summit



days. However, on each of these day, after a certain amount of ascent we emerged above a swirling sea of cloud with all the nearby peaks jutting through, and enjoyed two glorious days walking.

On one of these we made a fairly steep, technical, slabby ascent of the nearby peak of Neveron de Urriello, across the valley from the Naranjo. From this summit we enjoyed magnificent views across to the Naranjo, above the sea of clouds.

So, two days climbing on the Naranjo and two days walking from the hut, together with two days climbing in the valley below - all of which were excellent and added up to a very good trip.

Some Practicalities

We flew to Bilbao (via Stansted), from which it is about 120 miles drive to the start of the walk in to the Urriello hut. There are various ways to walk in, but all of them are fairly hard if you are carrying climbing gear.

The route we adopted was roughly 4 miles and 1700 metres of ascent - easy enough if you are skipping along in fell running shoes carrying a water bottle, but not so easy with 20Kg of heavy metal on your back (the sort of load I usually struggle to carry from the taxi to the airport check in).

There are two similar routes in, one longer but much easier angled and on

a good path - this one is to be strongly recommended!

There is a funicular part of the way up, but we did not use it. Hence, we basically devoted two days to the journey in each direction, with a day for the walk in and out, and did some valley cragging on the driving days.

The hut is very pleasant and does nutritious and filling evening meals (at least, it does if you like various combinations of tuna and pasta - they also seem to be geared up to deal with vegetarians).

Breakfast basically consisted of a small coffee and a big packet of rich tea biscuits, and some very hard fragments of toast (I occasionally thought to myself that it may turn out to be fortuitous that Ruth is a dentist).

It seems to get very busy at weekends (on the way down we passed a lot of people heading up, despite the drizzle), so would be worth booking then, but was relatively quiet during the week when we were there.

Mid September seemed a fairly good time to go there: temperatures oscillated between moderately hot to moderately cool, but never extreme, and although we got two temperature inversions and a drizzly walk down, we got a lot of sunshine as well. Given that the area is located just south of the Atlantic coastline it is probably always going to be prone to getting some rain.

